

"Ivàn Ivànovitch."

IN MEMORIAM.

Thrice crowned wast thou, each crown of pride, a child—thy charge!
Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou enlarge
On how or why the loss: life left to utter 'lost,'
Condemns itself beyond appeal.—BROWNING.

"Well, he has left us who knew us! Never, since Shakspeare wrote,
Has there been his like for discerning the beam and the mote:—
Every shifting and turning, every pitiful wile
Of this poor human nature of ours! Yet he loved us the while!"
"Men talk of morals and manners; they preach and proclaim the law:
And he? Oh, he's but a poet! Yet who, as he, can draw
Back the veil we hang for decorum, to hide from shamèd eyes
That naked and ugly horror, the *self* the sane man flies?
Not since Shakspeare, say you? Nay, not since that night long ago;—
'*Is it I?*' says each in a whisper, cheek blanched, blood checked in its flow;
For the possible sin of his bosom leaps forth to the man's surprise,
And the Twelve stand, conceivably, traitors, before the com-
passionate Eyes!"
"Aye! so *he* takes a poor soul as men go, not so bad nor so good,
And, quick, comes a moment supreme—that poor soul does less well than it could—
Falls, straight, into guilt abysmal: and you? How better than this?"

What warrant have you, o'ertaken, not to plunge into like abyss?

"*'Is it I?'* you cry in abasement! This is worse than thunders of law,

Worse than terrors of fire; these be the worms that gnaw!
A Preacher of Righteousness, this, who, knowing to send
The bolt to the heart of the sinner, gives him chance to amend!"

"Shame to humanity!—Say, then, was ever, in prose or verse,
Tale so horrible-piteous, show of human nature at worse
Than you have it in Ivàn Ivànovitch—you know the run of the tale—

Group of villagers startled by sight of a woman, pale,
One of their own, come back to them, in a sledge, all alone;
How, when their kindness had thaw'd her, 'twas, perforce, to reveal

Tale of horror and guilt she labour'd poor words to conceal!
And what was her crime? Why, this—that she was alive to tell
How wolves had snatch'd three sons from her clasp—gorged on each as he fell!"

"Fell! How?"

"None asked in the village; as she knelt, poor soul,
One stroke of an axe clave her neck, and her woman's head did roll

As the branching crown of a tree when the woodman severs the bole.

A strong man, Ivàn Ivànovitch, blest with clear inner light;
'Do this,' God said, and he did it; nor ever doubted his right
To take the life of a slayer, 'red-hand' in impious flight."
"A tale to haunt you, I grant, but wide of our talk, for, here,
Is the tale of a sin we could not; our children are over dear;
We spoil them rather."

"Agreed, if such only as these
Are the wolves that be on us! Think; does no woman, for ease,

In this high civilisation of ours, leave her offspring a prey
To wolves that eat out the vitals—gnaw the good heart away?"
"What, the mere faults of a child?"

"Aye; the faults of a child, let be,
Run down the man to his ruin:—waste o' breath to impugn the decree!"
M. SHAW